

The Sin of Not Thanking God

By **Jerry Pierce** (<https://billygraham.org/author/jpierce/>) • November 21, 2017

SHARE 12 <https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=>

TWEET <https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https%3A%2F%2Fbillygraham.org%2F%3FP%3D59478%26SHARER%3D1&text=%40DECISIONNEWS%3>



The Apostle Paul clearly identifies a lack of thankfulness as a key step in a culture's descent into sin and depravity.

Any casual observer to the 24-hour news cycle and the relentless buzz of social media can tell something in contemporary culture is awry. Heightened racial tensions, sexual anarchy and political polarization rule the headlines.

Morally, society is unhinged, with murders up by 7.9 percent over last year and by more than 20 percent over two years ago, according to the FBI. The very definition of marriage and family has been damaged by the nation's Supreme Court and activist judges seeking to exchange the wisdom of the ages for folly.

As the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday approaches, the fourth Thursday in November is merely "Turkey Day" for many people, with no particular god in mind and only a vague sense that they are supposed to be thankful—to someone or something. Football, food and drink drown out any echo (Romans 1:19-20) of a Creator who is worthy of their thanksgiving.

The Apostle Paul clearly explains in Romans 1:18-32 that failing to honor God and give Him thanks is at the root of societal collapse: "His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Romans 1 goes on to say that as people suppress the truth that is seen in nature and resist the gracious God who created it, they dive deeply into moral lawlessness.

The chaos Paul describes is progressively severe as God's wrath is revealed—by His giving sinners what they want. Idolatry and rampant sexual immorality follow, including male and female homosexuality and the punitive results of it. God's creative order is trashed by the very ones created to bear His image.

John Stonestreet, president of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview and co-host of the *BreakPoint* broadcast, says that too often in the American context, the idolatry that has led to a moral and spiritual decline has been dressed up in quasi-Christian attire.

“It was A.W. Tozer who said that idolatry is often rooted in worshiping the wrong concept of God or an insufficient concept of God,” Stonestreet says. “That’s one of the reasons we see rampant idolatry in America, whether it’s sports figures or political messiahs or actual objects. We have a sense that God is my personal, private friend. He’s there to help *me*.” But with such a shallow concept of God, people tend to put Him on a shelf.

“I’ve heard atheists and agnostics describe a sense of gratefulness. But that doesn’t make any sense in their worldview. It’s what is called cognitive dissonance. Who are they thanking? Who are they grateful to?”

—John Stonestreet

And if God is out of view, our fallen inclination is to give credit elsewhere or to place our faith in something other than God, which is squarely where Romans 1 lands. Idolatry ensues, Stonestreet says.

Yet, even among self-proclaimed agnostics, atheists and the various “nones” who don’t even pretend to worship God, there is still an impulse to be thankful, Stonestreet adds. Some atheist apologists have tried to justify their thankfulness in what they deem a purely material world of fortunate accidents.

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22-23) seems to be in play.

Popular atheist and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has described feeling “sort of an abstract gratitude” at the wonders of the universe.

“I’ve heard atheists and agnostics describe a sense of gratefulness,” Stonestreet says. “But that doesn’t make any sense in their worldview. It’s what is called cognitive dissonance. Who are they thanking? Who are they grateful to?”



The vandalized remains of a Ten Commandments monument are gathered on the Oklahoma State Capitol grounds.
Photo: Sean Murphy/AP Images

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote in a Thanksgiving blog post that thankfulness is one of the fundamental things we owe God. In fact, Mohler says, thanksgiving to God, properly understood, is a “deeply theological act” that reveals what one believes about God (http://peacewithgod.net/?utm_source=bgmainsite&utm_medium=pwg+Link&utm_campaign=pwg+Internal&utm_content=proud+people+don't+say+thanks+john+piper+decision+article+111717&outreach=proud+people+no+thanks), himself and his place in the world that God has made.

To observe Thanksgiving rightly, one must acknowledge the holiness and majesty of the God to whom thanks is due, and also the utter sinfulness of humanity apart from Jesus Christ.

The opposite—to oppose God by ignoring His kindness or placing credit elsewhere—“is a raw form of the primal [original] sin,” Mohler said. Unfortunately, such opposition to God is the norm.

John MacArthur, longtime pastor of Grace Community Church in Southern California, says thankfulness is a distinguishing human trait—and so is the innate shame that comes from showing ingratitude toward the Creator. “The shame of such ingratitude is inscribed on the human conscience, and even the most dogmatic atheists are not immune from the knowledge that they ought to give thanks to God,” MacArthur wrote in a Thanksgiving column.

Romans 1:19 says that God has clearly shown His power and divine nature to them, yet they suppress the truth of Who it is that deserves honor and thanks. Some skeptics, for example, have suggested that thanking people for the good they do is sufficient.

“Of course, we ought to be thankful on a human level to people who help make our lives better. But if thanking people exhausts your sense of blessedness and satisfies that ‘sort of abstract gratitude’ you feel when pondering the vastness of the universe, you have already suppressed your own conscience to a frightening degree. Your worldview is spiritually bankrupt.” —John MacArthur

Responding to that, MacArthur wrote: “Of course, we ought to be thankful on a human level to people who help make our lives better. But if thanking people exhausts your sense of blessedness and satisfies that ‘sort of abstract gratitude’ you feel when pondering the vastness of the universe, you have already suppressed your own conscience to a frightening degree. Your worldview is spiritually bankrupt.”

Stonestreet says the tendency, especially in the West, is to feel entitled to material blessings and the good life. God gets overshadowed by material things.

“It is the natural temptation, after the Fall, to put ourselves, our own wants, desires or abilities in the place of God,” Stonestreet says. “That’s why a proper conception of God is so crucial. When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, the first thing He taught them was theology: In the beginning, God.” They are also warned repeatedly to “remember” God’s gracious acts.

In light of the Gospel, the responsibility for thanksgiving has even greater clarity.

“That’s why,” writes MacArthur, “we remind ourselves to give thanks to God—specifically, the one true God who has revealed Himself in Scripture as a God of grace and forgiveness, who so loved the world that He gave His Son as an atonement for sin, so ‘that we might die to sin and live to righteousness,’ according to 1 Peter 2:24.

“He graciously compels us to thank Him, and He Himself should top the list of things we are thankful for.” ©2017 BGEA

Is Christ your Lord and Savior? Ask Him into your heart. (http://peacewithgod.net/?utm_source=bgmainsite&utm_medium=pwg+Link&utm_campaign=pwg+Internal&utm_content=the+sin+of+not+thanking+god+112117&outreach=sin+not+thank+god)

GIVE TO WHERE MOST NEEDED



\$25

\$50

\$100

\$250

\$

50

- ☒ One-time Gift
- ☐ Monthly Gift

GIVE NOW

Leave a Comment

Your email address will not be published but you will receive our next BGEA ministry update. You can opt out of future emails at any time.

Name *

Your Name

Email *

youremail@something.com

Comment

750 characters maximum

POST A COMMENT

MORE FROM THIS ISSUE

[Rekindling the Gratitude \(https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/rekindling-the-gratitude/\)](https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/rekindling-the-gratitude/)

[Proud People Don't Say Thanks \(https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/proud-people-dont-say-thanks/\)](https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/proud-people-dont-say-thanks/)

[America's Epidemic: How Opioid Addicts Find Help in the Church \(https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/americas-epidemic-how-opioid-addicts-find-help-in-the-church/\)](https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/americas-epidemic-how-opioid-addicts-find-help-in-the-church/)

[Flying Blind—and Finding the Way Home \(https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/flying-blind-and-finding-the-way-home/\)](https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/flying-blind-and-finding-the-way-home/)

[First Things First: Raiders QB Derek Carr on His Faith in Christ \(https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/first-things-first-derek-carr-on-his-faith-in-christ/\)](https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/november-2017/first-things-first-derek-carr-on-his-faith-in-christ/)

Read Today's Devotion

[Not Good Enough \(https://billygraham.org/devotion/not-good-enough/\)](https://billygraham.org/devotion/not-good-enough/)



[\(https://billygraham.org/devotion/not-good-enough/\)](https://billygraham.org/devotion/not-good-enough/)

Email updates Get BGEA news and inspiration

SIGN UP

<http://www.facebook.com/billygrahamevangelisticassociation>) <http://www.twitter.com/bgea>)

<http://www.youtube.com/BillyGraham>) <http://pinterest.com/bgea/>)

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

1 Billy Graham Parkway, Charlotte, NC 28201
Local: 704-401-2432
Toll Free: 1-877-247-2426

BGEA is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

[©2018 BGEA \(/copyright\)](#) [Home \(/\)](#) [Privacy \(/privacy-policy\)](#) [Permissions \(/legal-permissions\)](#) [Contact Us \(/about/contact\)](#)